

Metonymic Motivation of the CONDUIT Metaphor

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study the metonymic motivation of the conduit metaphor. Following the radical hypothesis presented by Barcelona (2003) – that every metaphor is motivated by conceptual metonymy –, the metonymic structure of the target domain communication is analyzed. Two metonymies are identified as conceptual prerequisites for the metaphorical mapping communication is sending ideas, described in this paper as the basic metaphor of the idealized cognitive model that has been named conduit metaphor. Another related metonymical mapping is analyzed in order to show the difference between metonymic motivation and simple metonymic coherence. A hypothesis is presented according to which the metonymic motivation of the communication is sending ideas metaphor corresponds to the second type posited by Barcelona (2003) and the basic structure of the complex idealized model of communication named conduit is described.

Ziel dieses Beitrages ist die Untersuchung der metonymischen Motivation der Conduit-Metapher, gemäß der von Barcelona (2003) postulierten radikalen Hypothese, nach der, jede Metapher von konzeptuellen Metonymien motiviert wird. Die metonymische Struktur der Zieldomäne Kommunikation wird analysiert und zwei Metonymien werden identifiziert, die als konzeptuelle Vorbedingungen für die metaphorische Projektion Kommunikation als Ideentransfer fungieren. Diese Projektion wird im vorliegenden Beitrag als die Grundmetapher des idealisierten kognitiven Conduit-Modells betrachtet. Eine weitere, auf dieses Modell bezogene metonymische Projektion wird analysiert, um den Unterschied zwischen metonymischer Motivation und einfacher metonymischer Kohärenz zu zeigen. Vertreten wird die These, dass die metonymische Motivation des metaphorischen Konzepts Kommunikation als Ideentransfer der zweiten der von Barcelona (2003) beschriebenen Motivationsarten entspricht; ebenso wird die Grundstruktur des komplexen idealisierten Conduit-Kommunikationsmodells beschrieben.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to study the metonyms that motivate the CONDUIT metaphor (Reddy 1993 [1979]). Barcelona (2003a) forwards the hypothesis that all metaphors are motivated by conceptual metonymy, that is, that all metaphorical mappings presuppose a prior metonymic mapping from the conceptual point of view. If metonymy is understood as a mapping within the same domain of experience and metaphor as a mapping between two different domains (Lakoff/Turner 1989:103-104, Goosens 1995:176, Barcelona 2003:3-5), the verification of this hypothesis would indicate that the metaphorical *leap* (Goosens 1995:201) from one domain to another must be previously prepared or aided by an internal mapping (for further information on the issue of the definition and delimitation of experiential domains, see Barcelona 2003:8-10).

Barcelona's hypothesis (2003a) also appears to be coherent with the claim made by Baldauf (2003), whereby the target domain of a metaphorical mapping is not a complete concept (such as LOVE or LIFE), but rather an abstract sub-concept (such as TRANSITION or CONTENTION), which

explains that the same concept can receive different metaphorical mappings, depending on the sub-concept that one wishes to emphasise in each case (that is, according to the metonymic mapping that structures the target domain of the metaphor in each case).

Barcelona (2003a:35-44) identifies two types of metonymic motivation: In the first of these, the metaphor is motivated by a metonymic pre-comprehension of the target domain that limits the election of the source domain. This is the case with the metaphor *DEVIANT COLOURS ARE DEVIANT SOUNDS*, which is motivated and limited by the selection of a metonymic model within the target domain (colours that involuntarily attract attention), which in turn enables the metonymic structuring of a source domain (sounds that involuntarily attract attention) and a metaphorical mapping to be established between both of them. In this example, the metaphor arises from two metonymically structured domains of experience.

In the second type of metonymic motivation described by Barcelona (2003a:39-44), the metaphor is developed from a metonymy that condenses the experiential basis of the metaphorical mapping. Its development corresponds to a process of generalisation or abstraction, which is itself metonymic. An example of this type of motivation is provided by emotion metaphors based on the physiological effects of emotions, such as *SADNESS IS DOWN*. In this case, a basic metonymy provides access to the concept of sadness departing from the image of a downward oriented bodily posture (effect-for-cause). A second metonymy within the source domain of the basic metonymy (downward bodily posture) leads, via a process of abstraction, to the downward spatial orientation in general. This is how the metaphor *SADNESS IS DOWN* is arrived at. In this metaphor, the mapping takes place between two domains of experience: that of abstract *SPATIAL ORIENTATION* and that of *SADNESS*. This second type of metonymic motivation is based on the generalisation of a common correlation in experience and comes from a single experiential domain.

The hypothesis advocated in this paper is that the metonymic motivation of the *CONDUIT* metaphor corresponds to the second type described by Barcelona (2003a). In accordance with this idea, the *CONDUIT* metaphor develops out of a single metonymically structured domain of experience through a process of abstraction which is itself metonymic.

2. The CONDUIT Metaphor

The conduit metaphor was studied by Reddy (1993 [1979]), who offered more than one hundred types of expressions in English as examples. Brünner (1987:105) provided numerous German-language examples of this metaphor, with Baldauf (1997:25) identifying a total of 200 utterances in a corpus of German journalist texts. According to the CONDUIT metaphor, „THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, IDEAS ARE ENTITIES, and communication involves taking ideas out of the mind, putting them into words, and sending them to other people“ (Lakoff 1987:450). Communication is understood as a transfer of ideas inside of containers especially designed for this purpose: words. The sender must use the proper signs to convey the contents that he wants to communicate while the recipient’s task is to extract those contents from their containers.

Vanparys (1995), based on an empirical study of metaphors for linguistic action, arrived at the conclusion that Reddy (1993 [1979]) had exaggerated the importance of the CONDUIT metaphor in English metalanguage. The use of a comprehensive database of metaphorical expressions about linguistic action enabled this researcher to show the richness and complexity of the conceptual metaphors used in this context:

“The wide range of conceptualizations conventionalized in the English lexicon certainly undermines Reddy’s pessimistic conclusion: rather than imposing one single model, the English language as its own metalanguage gives its users the opportunity to select from a rich gamut of expressions” (Vanparys 1995:34).

Nevertheless, although it is not the sole metaphorical mapping reflected in English metalanguage, the CONDUIT metaphor performs an important function in the conceptualization of communicative processes, to the extent that it offers an idealized communication model which, as claimed by Reddy (1993 [1979]:176), would seem difficult to disregard completely, since a great deal of our everyday understanding of communication is structured on it. From this point of view, the CONDUIT metaphor is not a single metaphorical mapping, but constitutes an idealized cognitive model (ICM) in the sense of Lakoff (1987). An ICM is a “complex structured whole, a gestalt” (Lakoff 1987:68) that provides structure to our knowledge. ICMs are experientially and culturally motivated; they are idealized, in so far as they are based on typical and salient experiences, and allow us to organize our knowledge and to categorize our experiences. ICMs follow four kinds of structuring principles: propositional structure, image-schematic structure, metaphoric mappings and metonymic mappings (Lakoff 1987:68). The CONDUIT ICM is structured through metaphoric

and metonymic mappings. What follows are the essential metaphorical components of the CONDUIT idealized model:

- (a) COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER
- (b) IDEAS ARE OBJECTS
- (c) PERSONS/MINDS ARE CONTAINERS
- (d) LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS

In this connection, it does not appear as though any of the metaphorical mappings described by Vanparys (1995) contradict this model (quite the opposite is true, as the majority are coherent with it); nor does it seem easily replaceable by other models that are more plausible from the cognitive standpoint, such as the model of inferential CONSTRUCTION of meaning, following Reddy's *toolmakers paradigm* (1993 [1979]:171-176), or a model of ACCESS TO A NETWORK of meanings, as proposed by Langacker (1987:453):

“Instead of viewing an expression as a container for meaning, we can regard it as providing access to various knowledge systems of indefinite expanse (possibly to be conceived as networks [...]).”

In the context of connectionism, meaning is understood as the EMERGENT GLOBAL STATE OF A SYSTEM (Hendriks-Jansen 1996:75), and for the approaches of Situated Cognition, meaning is something CONSTRUCTED or NEGOTIATED in interactions between people (Hendriks-Jansen 1996:xi). None of these models (CONSTRUCTION, ACCESS TO A NETWORK, EMERGENT STATE OF A SYSTEM, NEGOTIATION) seem to be reflected to a large extent in our everyday language about communication. In Vanpary's survey of metalinguistic English metaphors (1995), only the CONSTRUCTION model seems to be reflected in the verbs of making used in the context of communication (such as *make a promise*, *construct a sentence*, Vanparys 1995:14).

In contrast, the idealized CONDUIT model not only structures to a large extent our everyday understanding of communicative processes; it also has a significant bearing on some of the scientific models developed in the realm of linguistics and communication theory, as with the mathematical communication model of Shannon and Weaver (1949) and, in general, those models based on the sender-recipient schema (see Brünner 1987:110).

As pointed out by Vanparys (1995:24), the notion of CONDUIT does not in reality play an essential role in this metaphorical model. More than as a pipeline or conduit, language is understood as a CONTAINER that enables the transmission of the meanings it contains. It must also be mentioned

that the idealized model of communication as the transmission of ideas does not get fully reflected in each metaphorical instance. Thus, for example, a metaphorical expression may allude to the transmission of ideas without making reference to language as a container (Vanparys 1995:24) or vice-versa. The reason for this is that what has been called CONDUIT metaphor is not a simple metaphorical mapping; instead, it is a complex idealized model in which there is an interplay of different metonymies and metaphors that are coherent with one another, and which may get reflected separately in language. This paper regards the metaphor COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS as the basic metaphorical mapping of the idealized CONDUIT model.

3. Metonymic Motivation of the CONDUIT Metaphor

In accordance with the hypothesis set forth herein, the metaphorical mapping that constitutes the basic structure of the CONDUIT model (COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS) is motivated by two metonymic projections. The first of these metonymies provides a prior structure to the COMMUNICATION domain by mapping a schema that forms a part of this domain – that of the PHYSICAL TRANSMISSION OF SIGNALS – on the whole of the selfsame domain. Physically sending or transmitting signals forms part of communication and provides a simple, experience-based schema that enables the communicative process as a whole to be structured by means of a metonymic generalization. This schema is comprised of a SENDER, an OBJECT (the physical signals sent) and a RECIPIENT. This first metonymic mapping (COMMUNICATION IS SENDING SIGNALS) takes place in what will be the target domain of the CONDUIT metaphor, the COMMUNICATION domain, which it provides with a basic structure.

The second metonymic projection that participates in the motivation of the CONDUIT metaphor was described by Reddy (1993 [1979]:176-188) as *semantic pathology*. This metonymy maps linguistic expressions on their meaning, that is, it enables the concept of MEANING to be accessed from the concept of LINGUISTIC EXPRESSION. Thus, in English, the same word (text, poem, book, etc.) serves to allude to linguistic expressions as well as the meanings that may be constructed from them, which for Reddy (1993 [1979]) constitutes a linguistic pathology.

It should be pointed out that this ambiguity has not always been defined as metonymy. For Croft (1993:349-350), this involved the activation or highlighting of different aspects of the corresponding concept. However, Barcelona (2003:12-15) does consider this type of ambiguity to

be a case of metonymy in the broad sense. As stated by Goosens (1995:178), the difference between the highlighting of intrinsic or extrinsic aspects of a concept, which is the criterion chosen by Croft (1993) to distinguish between literal and metonymic usage, cannot be approached in absolute terms; rather, it is a question of degree, with the lines between literal and metonymic usage being blurred. This paper, in keeping with Barcelona (2003), regards the ambiguous use of such terms as *word*, *book*, *poem*, etc., as a case of metonymy in the broad sense. According to Reddy (1993 [1979]:179), what makes this metonymy possible is precisely the CONDUIT metaphor:

“It is easy to see that this ambiguity of the term “poem” is intimately related to the conduit metaphor. If the words in language contain the ideas, then POEM₁ contains POEM₂, and metonymy, a process of meaning extension second in importance only to metaphor, takes over.”

In accordance with the hypothesis presented in this paper, exactly the opposite occurs: It is this metonymic projection that makes possible, from the conceptual point of view, the CONDUIT metaphor. The experience of the usual correlation between the words and the meanings attributed to them forms the basis of a metonymy that enables a modification of the initial communication schema (SENDER – PHYSICAL SIGNALS – RECIPIENT), replacing physical signals with meanings or ideas. This is how we arrive at the basic schema of the CONDUIT metaphor, according to which a sender sends ideas or meanings to a recipient (SENDER – IDEAS – RECIPIENT). This second metonymy now places us in the region of the metaphor, putting us before a mapping between two different domains of experience: that of the TRANSFER OF OBJECTS and that of the COMMUNICATION OF IDEAS.

Metonymic motivation of the metaphor COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS:

1 st metonymy:	SENDING SIGNALS → COMMUNICATION COMMUNICATION IS SENDING SIGNALS
2 nd metonymy:	SIGNALS → MEANINGS SIGNALS ARE MEANINGS
metaphor:	SENDING MEANINGS → COMMUNICATION COMMUNICATION IS SENDING MEANINGS

This metaphor implies a reification of the ideas or meanings, which are conceived as objects, and is coherent with the CONTAINER schema, which enables the relationship between words and meanings to be structured as one of contention. Linguistic expressions are conceived as CONTAINERS of meanings, feelings, etc. This is a frequent metaphorical mapping in English metalanguage (Pauwels 1995:148) that gets articulated with the basic schema of the CONDUIT

metaphor: Ideas are sent within words and, as asserted by Reddy (1993 [1979]:168), the receptor's task is to extract the meanings transported by language.

Lastly, the metaphor according to which PEOPLE OR MINDS ARE CONTAINERS (Lakoff 1987:450, Lakoff/Johnson 1999:338) enables the completion of a coherent communication model according to which ideas are extracted from the mind and transmitted to other persons through language.

4. INTENTION FOR MEANING

To conclude the analysis of the interaction between metonymy and metaphor in the CONDUIT metaphorical model, a metonymic mapping closely bound up with this model will be outlined. If the hypothesis presented in this paper is correct, the CONDUIT metaphor has its experiential basis in the communication domain, and specifically in the usual correlation between communication acts and physically sending signals. The metonymy that relates the signals with the meanings attributed to them enables communication to be conceived in terms of the transmission of ideas or meanings. The assumption implicit in this metaphorical model is that the meanings of (linguistic) signals are invariable objects (contained in them, as per the CONTAINER metaphor). An identity is thus established between the meanings that a sender wants to communicate and those interpreted by a recipient: interpretation gets reduced to a process of extracting the meaning *put in* the words by the sender.

It is possible to define a metonymic mapping that appears to be coherent with this conception of meanings as invariable objects, that which is established between the COMMUNICATIVE INTENTION of a sender and the MEANING of the signals emitted by him, both of which are included in the broadest COMMUNICATION domain. The relationship between these two domains may be defined as CAUSE-EFFECT, to the extent that, in general, it can be supposed that the intentions of a sender determine the words he chooses and therefore the meanings that can be constructed from them.

This metonymic mapping is reflected in the double meaning (psychological and philosophical) of the term *intentionality* (Hendriks-Jansen 1996:260) and in the ambiguous use of the verbs *mean* and *intend*, which may refer to the INTENTION OF A SUBJECT as well as to the MEANING OF AN OBJECT, as shown in the following examples:

- (1) I **intended** to catch the early train, but I didn't get up in time (LASDE)¹
- (2) What do his words **intend**? (CED)

What follows is a brief analysis of the metonymic structure of the verb *mean* based on the different accepted definitions listed in the CED (in each case, the source of examples is provided in parentheses). The different meanings of the verb *mean* can be grouped around two main semantic poles: In the first of these, the (prototypical) subject of the verb is a person; in the second, an object. The meanings of the first group revolve around the notion of SUBJECT INTENTION. The meanings of the second group revolve around the notion of OBJECT MEANING:

I Subject intention:

- to intend to convey or express
- (3) I **meant** we'd have to leave early – that's all (LDCE)
 - intend
 - (4) I've been **meaning** to phone you all week (LDCE)
 - to say or do in all seriousness
 - (5) The boss **means** what he says (CED)
 - to have the intention of behaving or acting
 - (6) He may sound a bit rude at times, but he **means** well (LDCE)
 - to destine or design (for a certain person or purpose)
 - (7) The diagram is **meant** to show the different stages of the process (LDCE)

II Object meaning:

- to denote or connote; signify; represent
- (8) Examples help show exactly what a word **means** (CED)
 - to produce; cause
 - (9) The weather will **mean** long traffic delays (CED)
 - to foretell; portend
 - (10) Those dark clouds **mean** rain (CED)
 - to have the importance of
 - (11) Money **means** nothing to him (CED)

¹ The abbreviations stand for the following dictionaries: *Longman Active Study Dictionary of English* (LASDE), *Collins English Dictionary* (CED) and *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDCE).

The sense given in (7) may be regarded as a transition between I and II in the (prototypical) cases in which it is used in the passive form, with an action-receiving subject that corresponds to an object bound or designed for a specific purpose:

(12) These chairs are *meant* for guests (LDCE)

In these cases, the intention of a subject determines the function or the meaning of an object (CAUSE – EFFECT relationship). Within group II, a clear distinction can be made between those objects whose main function is communicative and therefore whose meaning bears a relation to the intention of the subjects that employ them (8) and those in which this intentional relationship does not exist (9, 10 and 11).

The metonymy that affords access to the concept of MEANING starting from the concept of INTENTION is coherent with the CONDUIT metaphorical model, since it enables a relationship of identity to be established between the intended meaning and that which is obtained as a result of the interpretation of a given communicative act. Both this metonymy and the CONDUIT metaphorical model imply a reification of meaning, which is considered as an invariable entity throughout the communicative process.

Nevertheless, although it is coherent with the CONDUIT metaphorical model, the metonymy INTENTION FOR MEANING does not participate in the motivation of the basic CONDUIT metaphor, since it is not necessary for this metaphor to be established. From the conceptual point of view, the following requirements are necessary for the metaphorical mapping COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS to be established:

- a.) The metonymic structuring of the domain COMMUNICATION AS SENDING SIGNALS.
- b.) The metonymic projection between SIGNALS and MEANINGS, which enables the understanding of COMMUNICATION AS SENDING MEANINGS.

Both the first metonymy and the final metaphor structure the COMMUNICATION domain as sending objects between subjects. When the objects sent correspond to physical signals, the mapping remains in the realm of the metonymy. When the objects, by virtue of another metonymic shift, become ideas or meanings, we now enter the sphere of the metaphor. The metonymic relationship established between the intentions of subjects and the ideas transmitted forms a part of a more complex communication model that is coherent with the basic metaphor. This metaphor is likewise coherent with other metaphors, such as that of the CONTAINER, and its articulation with

them gives rise to the idealized communication model that has been described as the CONDUIT model.

Thus, the fact that a metonymic mapping is coherent with a metaphor does not suffice in order for it to motivate it conceptually, although it may function to reinforce it and, as in the case of the CONDUIT model, it may form a part of an idealized model in which other metaphors also participate.

5. Summary

The CONDUIT metaphor is not a simple metaphorical mapping between two clearly delimited domains of experience, but rather a complex communication model in which there is the participation of diverse metonymic and metaphorical mappings that are coherent with one another. This model offers a reifying vision of the communicative process and enables it to be rationalised, simplifying some of its problematic aspects (namely, the relationship between the signals transmitted and the meanings that can be constructed from them).

The CONDUIT metaphorical model is formed by a basic metaphor, COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS, that gets articulated with the metaphors IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, MINDS ARE CONTAINERS and WORDS ARE CONTAINERS. The basic metaphor COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS is motivated by two metonymic mappings, COMMUNICATION IS SENDING SIGNALS and SIGNALS ARE MEANINGS. The first of these metonymies condenses the experiential basis of the metaphor, which corresponds to the usual transmission of physical signals during communication. The general character of this experience and the ubiquity of the metonymy that associates the signals with the meanings that may be constructed from them make the CONDUIT metaphor appear to be a literal description of the communicative process.

The hypothesis presented herein about the metonymic motivation of the CONDUIT metaphor is coherent with Barcelona's approach (2003a).

6. References

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